



Rev. Anne Jensen – January 14, 2007

Epiphany 2C John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.



A couple of years ago Doug and I were invited to an Orthodox Jewish wedding in New York City, a totally new experience for us. Near the door where we came in was a large silver urn, and many of the guests went to the urn when they first came in and washed their hands. After a few minutes of observation we figured out that this was the “station” for ritual purification, a modern interpretation of an ancient Jewish practice. It’s a way of getting ready to meet God in worship.

In today’s gospel we have a story about a wedding, at least on the surface it appears to be about a wedding where they ran out of wine. However, as in several other stories in John’s gospel, we have a story that is layered. As we peel back the layers new meaning is uncovered, and we have a revelation about who Jesus truly is. We read this story during the season of Epiphany because Epiphany is a season of light and revelation, of showing forth the divine nature of the man Jesus.

So there is this small town outside of Nazareth where there is a wedding. Jesus, his mother and a few of his disciples are there for the festivities. The wine runs out, a situation Mary points out to Jesus. His reply sounds very odd to us: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me. My hour has not yet come.” Why would he address his mother that way, and what does this mean? Scholars generally agree that he is not being disrespectful to his mother, but rather he is creating distance from his mother. As we talked about this passage as part of our Bible study in the vestry retreat yesterday, we imagined that there was a little drama going on that had the dynamic of a time of transition. Jesus has been baptized and has been tempted in the desert. He has gathered a

few of the disciples. Maybe his mother has a notion of Jesus being on the brink of an enterprise that needs to begin. She offers him a situation in which to act, but he resists saying, "My hour has not yet come." His mother turns to the servants and talking past him, says, "Do whatever he says."

So if you were in this position, you might just turn to your friends and change the subject, but there's an opening here, and essentially Jesus steps into it. Although he says his hour has not yet come, it begins in the very next words he speaks.

Here we need to gather some background information. The six large stone jars are for water for purification...120-180 gallons, an extravagant amount of water in a land where water is scarce. Jesus says, "Fill the jars with water." The water jars stand for the Law and its attendant rituals. Jesus tells the servants to draw off some of the water and take it to the steward, who apparently didn't know they were out of wine. He tastes the liquid and calls the bridegroom saying, "Everyone serves the best wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests become drunk, but you have kept the good wine until now." These words are full of meaning, way beyond the concerns of those at the wedding celebration. We don't see Jesus performing an act; we hear him give directions for others to act, and yet in between these words something monumental happens: the water becomes top of line wine. Yesterday with a little quick calculation Peter Bostock figured out that this was almost a 1000 bottles of wine. (Your vestry is always thinking and working on your behalf.) This is a sign of God's abundant grace, the abundance that we heard about in the lesson from Isaiah and in the psalm, and even more, the good wine that comes at last is Jesus. The people have received the Law and the prophets, and now, at last they have the incarnate Word of God in Jesus. Beyond this immediate symbolism, at the Last Supper Jesus will use wine as the symbol of his life poured out for the sake of the world.

It's a moment to take a deep breath and stand in awe of what this story reveals. Our modern minds want to know, "Did this really happen? Was one substance turned into another?" This wasn't a concern in the ancient world; this story is told to reveal a spiritual truth. The evangelist says this was the first of his signs...a sign is something that points to a direction or reveals something, in this case his glory. And his disciples believed in him. The disciples were able to experience Jesus, and they believed in him. Later Christians, including both the community for whom John was writing, and all of us, could only read about him. In Chapter 20 the evangelist tells us the gospel is written so that we might believe in him.

As we that we peel back the layers and glimpse a touch of his glory, my response is "Wow! I've just experienced a touch of the holy...I am in awe of such a God."

When I think about it, I can identify a sense of astonishment at God's great generosity, love and power, and it leaves me speechless.

Another response is that God is doing a new thing, a radically new thing. At Trinity, we are in a time of transition here, and God is doing a new thing. We need to be open to that new thing...and it may be very different from what we thought it might be or hoped it might be.

This past week a group of us from Trinity went to an all-day presentation by Brother Don Bisson, who is both a Jungian psychologist and a spiritual director. His topic was “The Wildness of God.” One of his talks was about the God who disturbs. I think this story is a great example of the God who disturbs. Jesus is stirring the waters, changing water into wine, showing that there is a force in our midst that we can’t domesticate, and what’s more, there will be more of these occasions. This was the first sign.

We often talk about the consolation of God, and yes, God does comfort, but that’s not all God does, witness today’s gospel. My question for you is how do you experience the God who disturbs, the Jesus who exhibits powers beyond human understanding?

Where in your life do you experience this Divine Power? Don used a metaphor that I found very helpful. He talked about the waves in our lives; sometimes they are gentle. Other times they are huge and they crash down around us and we wonder where God is, and we wonder why the waves keep coming. His teaching is that God is in the waves, and our job is to ride the waves, trusting in God, even if we don’t know where we are going to end up.

Where is God disturbing you, creating restlessness? Where is God disturbing us as a congregation? Can we trust that God is in the transition, in this time of waiting and expectation and in the messiness of things that fall between the cracks? Will you trust that God provides an abundance of grace, just as God provided all that wine?

I hope your answer is yes. Sometimes it is not easy to say yes to the crashing waves; it takes faith and it takes courage. And sometimes we don’t have those qualities at hand personally, but others in the body of Christ, the church, do. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians, each one of us has gifts to contribute to our common life, gifts that we need to share as we encounter the wildness of God, who has broken into our human existence in the person of Jesus. He revealed his true nature when he turned the water into wine. We encounter this disturbing power again and again when we find new life that emerges out of the crashing waves of doubt or illness or injury.

The wine of abundant grace is here. As we come to communion this morning and you take the cup, let this precious gift remind you both of God’s disturbing power and of God’s abundant grace.